

Mid-Course Corrections

**By Chap. (Maj.) Michael Allen
Fires Brigade Chaplain**

One of the ways I spend my time here in Iraq is watching movies.

The movie “Apollo 13,” reflects the story of how three men on a mission finally arrived home. The more often I watch this movie, the more “teachable moments” I see in it.

Some of the dialogue lines have become part of our conversations: “Houston, we have a problem.” Or “Failure is not an option.”

One of the scenes in the movie demonstrates one of the clearest definitions of faith that I can think of.

Marilynn Lovell has gone with her daughters to visit her mother-in-law in the nursing home. They are there to ensure that Mrs. Lovell understands what is happening with the crew and to be supportive of her.

As they are talking, Jim Lovell’s mom becomes the one providing assurance and comfort to them. The faith which she has in her son is reflected in her response to the other family members. It goes something like this:

“Are you worried, honey?” asks Mrs. Lovell.

One of Jim’s daughters nods as tears form in her eyes.

“Don’t you worry, if they could put wings on a washing machine, my Jimmy could land it,” says Mrs. Lovell.

The next scene in the movie demonstrates the reason for her faith.

It depicts the crews’ ability to fly their vehicle; they have to perform a corridor correction burn. It is something that has to be done to get home.

The engine that has to burn wasn’t designed to do so. The computers that are supposed to help with navigation and guidance are unavailable. The controls are backwards to what the crew is accustomed. They can’t see the stars because of all of the debris.

They had to work with what they had. Mrs. Lovell’s faith was well founded; as we all know they were successful in returning home.

In Apollo 13, it took the focused attention of several people for the successful return of the crew.

At one point in time, the crew was not even aware that they were off course. It took a view from the outside to tell them the extent of their problem.

It also took someone from the outside to tell them that if they were going to succeed in getting home; that they would have to let go of their goal to land on the moon. They had to conserve all of their available resources and use some things in unexpected ways. In fact, they even had to tear the cover off of the flight plan and use a sock to help provide clean air.

Most of us have had or will soon have the opportunity to return home for environmental morale leave. We can use this time to see what “mid-course corrections” need to be made before our tour of duty here ends and we return home.

It could be that we are right on the glide path and no changes need to be made. If so, celebrate! I encourage you to take a healthy look at your marriage, your family and your friendships. What positive changes can be made in our relationships?

If there is a problem, I encourage you to identify it. One of the first steps to getting help is successfully identifying a difficulty.

“Houston, we have a problem.” Before they could make a mid-course correction, it took a fresh look from someone outside the crew to help them identify how bad the problem was. It also took letting go of one of their goals; to return home. As a couple, it may take re-looking or reshaping your family or marriage goals to be successful in the return home.

Finally, as the crew of Apollo XIII approached the Earth; there were many concerns. Were they coming in too fast? Was there enough electricity in the batteries for the parachutes to deploy? Would they burn up in the atmosphere?

Many couples and single Soldiers from previous deployments reveal that the process of reunion and reintegration is more difficult than the process of leaving. You may find that you are having doubts and fears about the return process as well.

My father’s last duty station was with the Air Rescue Service. I spent many days watching the rescue teams rehearse jumping from a helicopter, deploying a raft and securing a flotation collar on a mock space capsule. The capsule would sink without the collar on it.

The raft is required because the astronauts are weak from not using their muscles in a weightless environment. It takes the continuous effort of the rescue team for the astronauts to return to “normal” life.

Our return process does not end at “splashdown,” stepping off the plane, or release from the formation. It will continue as we spend time with our families; as we take Block Leave, and as we return to duties at Fort Hood.

I encourage you to identify where and when you have a problem; just as in the movie, “Houston, we have a problem.” I also encourage you to hold on to the belief that in your marriage or your other relationships, “Failure is not an option.” Make it work; use everything at your disposal.